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AUTHOR Davis, E. Dale
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the reasons why Hispanic youth drop out of school. Three groups of Hispanic interviewers gathered information from a total of 245 Hispanic dropouts. Eighteen teachers interviewed 140 dropouts, 15 adolescents interviewed 72 dropouts, and 33 businessmen, of whom 6 responded to the interview for a relative who had dropped out. The following reasons why Hispanic students drop out of school are reported: (1) school-related factors were the most frequently reported; (2) economic factors were reported by more than 20 percent of the dropouts; (3) family-related factors were reported by at least 25 percent of the dropouts; (4) peer-related factors were reported by only eight of the dropouts; (5) about 20 percent of the dropouts reported generally favorable attitudes towards school despite the decision to drop out; (6) 35% of the dropouts reported positive attitudes towards school personnel; (7) about 40 percent of the dropouts reported positive attitudes towards school subjects; (8) all dropouts expressed specific dislikes about both teachers and school; and (9) slightly more than half of the dropouts indicated that an improvement in family-related factors would have been necessary for them to remain in school. Recommendations for dropout prevention are suggested. A list of 32 references (endnotes) is appended. (FMW)

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A STUDY OF HISPANIC DROPOUTS

There is a gradual--sometimes dramatic--reduction in the number of students remaining in high school from one year to another. In the lives of these students there are often special circumstances that cause them to drop out. It is also true that the school itself many times does not meet the needs of its students; thus some of them drop out because they do not have appropriate programs to pursue. In the 1980's in some large school systems as many as one-fourth to one-third of the students dropped out of grades nine, ten, and eleven.[1]

Some students drop out because of financial reasons; others quit because they are members of ethnic, economic, cultural or racial groups that either have little or no secondary school education traditions and backgrounds or secondary education seems to be a low priority in their individual and collective situations. Many drop out because the school programs appear too rigid and demanding of them; thus they see little that leads them to believe they can profit by staying in school. Students with average or below-average intelligence are less likely to complete a secondary school education than are students with above average intelligence. Low cultural and social backgrounds cause many students to drop out of high school. These are some of the generalizations which research on dropouts supports.

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Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, the author wanted to determine what Hispanics between the ages of 16 and 20 would give as the reason or reasons they left school. Second, this researcher wanted to survey the causes given in educational literature as to the reasons for young persons in general leaving school and compare these reasons with the ones given by the Hispanics in this specific study. A special feature of the study was that all subjects studied were interviewed or questioned by teenagers who were themselves Hispanics or by adult Hispanics who were teachers or business persons.

The teenage Hispanics who conducted the interviews were either high school students, junior-college students or undergraduate students in their freshman or sophomore years in a senior college. The business persons were (1) hotel cafeteria managers, (2) owners of cafes, (3) nurserymen, (4) lawn care operators, (5) office workers, (6) service station workers, (7) house painters, and (8) small contractors in carpentry. The teachers helping with the interviews were all Hispanic who had taught at least one year. Most of them were doing graduate work in the summers of 1987, '88, and '89.

None of the interviews were conducted on public school property, and all were designed to be informal and non-threatening to the persons being interviewed. This was the major reason why Hispanic business persons, teenagers, and teachers were used. The interviewers were instructed to be

friendly, courteous, and open in their informal interviews. They were, however, asked to be very business-like, direct, and thorough in their asking four key questions. These questions were as follows:

1. Why did you "quit" school?
2. What would have kept you from leaving school or what could have been done to have helped you stay in school? Some interviewers preferred to rephrase the question thus: What could the school do to help students like yourself finish school?
3. What did you like--if anything--about school?
4. What did you dislike most about school?

These interviews were conducted in parks, homes, on job sites, in yards being mowed, in nurseries and on landscape jobs, in cafeterias, other eating places, hotels, on streets, in shopping malls, and in homes. Many Hispanics gather in parks around Dallas on weekends, especially during the summer. Over half of the interviews in the Dallas area were made in Reverchon Park, in two shopping malls in Dallas and one in Plano, Texas. Interviews were also conducted in the Austin, Fort Worth, San Antonio, and Houston, Texas, areas.

Related Literature

Students dropping out of school is a problem in most communities in the United States. In the State of Texas it is a greater problem than in most states. In Texas during the last five years more than one of every four high school students failed to finish high school. Among minority groups and poor Anglos the rate is higher. This is a great loss in human

potential and one that society cannot long afford.[2] The loss in human potential is tragic. The economic loss in potential productivity has to be in the billions. In Texas the prison systems and welfare rolls are even now unable to accommodate the growing numbers of uneducated citizens. This is not to say that all persons who are dropouts end up in prison or on welfare rolls, but a very high percentage of persons in these two categories are dropouts and are persons with little education.

Texas is near the bottom among the states in percentage of high school graduates. In the 1987-88 school year it ranked 42nd of the 50 states. On the other hand, Texas is above the national average in college graduates, ranking 23 from the top. This may mean the state is doing a good job of educating the not-at-risk student. Texas is much less effective in dealing with the disadvantaged student. The reasons for the above facts is not that Texas has deliberately established a "have and have-nots" system. The causes are complex, and many of the reasons for students dropping out of school in Texas are also the reasons for students dropping out in other states. Texas and other states, however, must face up to the fact that the situation must be improved because the future and well being of American society depends on a complete and effective education for all students.

As will be stated and documented below, the dropout rate among minorities, especially Hispanics, is higher than the high school population in general. In 1988 the Texas Education Agency

released a report entitled the Texas School Dropout Survey Project. Findings from this state-wide survey project were as follows:

1. The attrition rate for Texas high school students was estimated at 33 percent.

2. Three out of every ten dropouts, or 152,000 young people, had completed less than nine years of schooling when they left school.

3. Nearly half a million Texas youth between the ages of 16 and 24 were not enrolled in school and had never completed the twelfth grade.

The survey report went on to state that the above data would not remain static because further examination of the state's demographic information reveals the emergence of "some startling facts:

1. Demography: The Texas population will be 40 percent ethnic/racial minority by the end of the century and the in-school minority population will be over 50 percent. The fate of Texas' ethnic groups is inextricably linked--if one succeeds, so does the other (Hodgkinson, 1986, p. 11).

2. Economic Development: Texas ranks 42nd nationally in the percentage of its youth who graduate from high school. Almost one-third of all Texas youth begin adult life without a high school diploma. Only 69 percent of Texas' 233,457 ninth graders graduated from high school in 1984. During the same time period, Minnesota graduated 96 percent of its students (Hodgkinson, 1986, p. 3)."

As one reviews the literature produced during the 1980's pertaining to dropouts, a problem of definitions arises. There is no universally accepted operational definition of what constitutes a "dropout". During the past decade the term "at risk" student was at times used synonymously with the word dropout. Most writers, however, make a distinction between the two words.

"It seems obvious that practitioners who want to help identify at-risk students and reduce dropout rates will need to clarify the target of their efforts before doing anything else."[4] A study of educational literature reveals an array of operational definitions. A dropout is no longer just a "dropout"--the person may be classified as a fallout, pushout, pullout, fadeout, or as discouraged, or defeated.[5]

Often a definition which has received widespread acceptance is adopted, according to the Texas Education Agency.[6] From those districts, agencies, and institutions which do define "dropout," this author found the following to be helpful:

1. "Persons neither enrolled in schools nor high school graduates" (TEA, Current Population Survey, 1989). This definition includes categories such as "pregnant teenagers" or "needed at home." (This is the operational definition used in this informal, descriptive study.)

2. "If you aren't in school and you haven't graduated, you're a dropout."[7]

3. The Bureau of Attendance for the State of New York has defined a dropout as "a pupil over compulsory attendance age who leaves school on his own volition before graduation from high school and without transferring to another school."[8]

The federal government has defined a dropout as "a student who leaves a school, for any reason except death. . . who has been in membership during the regular term and who withdraws before graduation. . . or completing an equivalent program of studies, whether dropping out occurs before or after reaching compulsory school attendance age."[9]

In this study a dropout was considered to be a person who left school for any reasons except death before graduation and without transferring to another school. In Texas a dropout is defined by the Dropout Reduction Program Act, Section 11.205(e) of the Texas Education Code as an individual who:

1. Does not hold a high school diploma or equivalent,
2. Is absent from the public school in which the student is enrolled for a period of 30 or more consecutive days, and
3. Whose attendance within that period at another public school or a private or parochial school cannot be evidenced.

The California State Department of Education defines a dropout as "any student who has not been enrolled in grade 10, 11, or 12 but who left school prior to graduation or the completion of a formal education or the legal equivalent, and who did not within 45 days enter another public or private educational institution or school program, as documented by a written request for a transcript from that institution."[10]

Characteristics of Dropouts

High schools usually do not do a good job in securing and recording information about students who drop out. This is understandable since the information most often must be pieced together through tedious and time-consuming efforts. Data which can reliably be used to answer questions as a rule is scattered, particulate, and largely unanalyzed. Because of these facts researchers have usually ended up interviewing or surveying persons who have dropped out of schools to ascertain why they

left. From these methods researchers often develop lists of characteristics which can be closely linked to students who are considered to be potential dropouts. This is, in essence, what was done in this study.[11]

There are, however, some serious limitations to the survey/interview process. The most obvious is that students may not be in the best position to give and accurately describe all of the information which is sought. For example, Poulos found that in one study more than one-half of youths who listed a "C" average in their report card marks prior to dropping out of school also reported failing grades as the major reason for leaving school. Poulos felt that a "D" average would have been a more realistic assessment of these students' academic performances.[12]

In most any study there are likely to be as many as fifteen to twenty reasons which are given as factors for persons dropping out of school. Given the imprecise classification schemes and the absence of standard definitions and measurements, subtleties and semantics have a large impact on how these factors are characterized. Usually the researcher must resort to a list of categories and fit the reasons or factors into these. For example, in the Texas Education Agency's Report, Characteristics of At-Risk Youth, poor reading, lack of basic skills, below grade-level performance, and failing competency tests are grouped in a category labeled "low academic achievement." Some studies keep these items as separate categories. Still the document just mentioned lists over twenty different characteristics which are associated with persons who drop out of school.[13]

The characteristics of dropouts most often listed in educational literature are low academic achievement, dislike of or dissatisfaction with teachers, dislike of school, absenteeism and truancy, rebellious attitudes and disruptive behavior, the desire or need to work, pregnancy, and marriage. These data correlate well with existing reviews of research (e.g., Green and Baker's 1986 review which cites the Oregon Department of Education Study of Early School Leavers; the dropout study conducted by the Edmonds, Washington, School District; and the High School and Beyond Study).

Research shows that a multiplicity of factors culminate in a student's decision to drop out of school. Green and Baker (1986) state that "there is overwhelming agreement that no single factor is more important than any other in predicting who is likely to drop out."[14] In reality most studies show that dropping out is usually the result of a combination of student-related factors. The 1986 California State Department of Education report is similar in its findings that research reports all emphasize the multiplicity of causes.

> McDill and others (1985) write of multiple causes of dropping out, which they group into factors related to school, current family obligations, and the lure of paid work.

A computer search by this writer turned up essentially the same causes as the ones listed above: not making progress in school, disliked school, needed a job to get money, being pregnant, could not pass courses, hated tests, saw little value for them.

According to Green and Baker, the best and most recent data available for learning about the dropout problem comes from the High School and Beyond Study, referred to above.[16] This was a longitudinal project sponsored by the National Center for Educational Statistics. This study consists of a survey of nearly 60,000 students (sophomores and seniors) beginning in 1980. This research has confirmed findings from prior research that identified the following in an ethnic or racial minority group: unsatisfactory relationship with family, low academic achievement, dissatisfaction with school, delinquent or truant behavior, low self-esteem, enrollment in a nonacademic curriculum, the need to work, and early pregnancy/marriage.[17]

However, knowing that there are several related factors associated with at-risk youth or potential dropouts may not help a person who wants to identify and assist a particular set of individuals. After all, most students manifest (at one time or another) at least one of these characteristics. So that at-risk youth can be made more easily targeted for assistance, researchers have attempted to identify the factors most common to those who have dropped out of school. Several authors have been willing to suggest characteristics which, they assert, are most closely associated with those who drop out of school and, therefore, with at-risk students. These characteristics are as follows:

1. "Truancy among marginal students" (Green and Baker, p. 14).
2. "Poor academic performance" (Hahn, 1987, p. 159).

3. "A history of failure in school starting in elementary grades" (California State Department of Education, 1986, p. 3).

4. "Frequent absenteeism and academic failure" (Stroup and Robins, 1972; Schreiber 1967; Silberberg and Silberberg, 1971; Kaplan and Luck, 1977).

5. "School performance, as measured by, and extent of problem behavior" (Green and Baker, 1986, p. 12, citing a study sponsored by the Educational Testing Service)."[18]

In 1986 Poulos reported that a typical dropout was of ethnic/racial minority origin and overaged for grade by two years. There was a slightly higher probability that the early school leaver was male. If the individual was female, the chances were two-out-of five that she was pregnant at the time of leaving school. If the youth was a male, there was a one-out-of-twenty chance that he left school for reasons of impending or actual fatherhood.[19]

The study, High School and Beyond, reports that males who leave school prior to graduation most often give poor grades as the reason. Following in order, they also mentioned that they disliked school, took a job, could not get along with teachers, had to support their family, or were expelled or suspended. The same study reported that females give marriage as their most common reason for quitting school. Other reasons given were they disliked school, received low grades, became pregnant, were offered a job, or could not get along with teachers.[20]

One important element, however, is the fact that the literature based on studies of the seventies and eighties shows that there is often very little or no positive correlation

between a student's abilities and his or her tendency to drop out of school. Green and Baker (1986) bring out that "there is general consensus that dropping out is not necessarily related to intelligence; children of all levels of ability and intelligence drop out of school." [21]

Research which should be helpful for educators provides information on the times most at-risk students drop out of school. Henry reported that the 1985 California Postsecondary Education Commission's Directors' Report identified three critical periods when most dropouts decide to leave school. These periods "are during junior high, at age 16, and just before high school graduation." [22] Green and Baker (1986) state that the Eugene, Oregon, study by Schellenberg (1985) found that absenteeism in the 9th grade was a strong indicator of persons at-risk of leaving school. This study also points out the fact that these figures "correspond to compulsory attendance laws"; [23] however, the relationship was not a formal aspect of the study.

Another interesting aspect of dropping out of school has received much publicity in the seventies and eighties. A report of the National Public Relations Association states that "the decision to leave may often be detected even in the early years of elementary school. Among the signs are (a) inability to read at grade level, (b) rebellious attitude toward teachers, classroom disruptions and emotional disturbances, (c) frequent absenteeism, and (d) a pattern of failure in school work." [24]

Boyer wrote, "If failure is not to become a way of life for many urban youths, we must recognize that poverty and schooling are connected. What we see as poor academic performance may be related to events that precede schooling and even birth itself."[25]

There is another area of interest pertaining to dropouts which studies of the 1980's show as being important. This area is at times referred to as school characteristics:

> It is both a wonderful and terrifying fact that researchers have begun to identify poor teachers, ineffective teaching techniques, and school environments as factors which contribute significantly to the high dropout rate among American youth. It is wonderful because if it is true, then practitioners can make significant progress in reducing dropout rates, if that which they control and understand can be modified. It is terrifying because if it is true, then educators have been identified as contributors to, not solvers of, many problems faced by at-risk youth.[26]

Wehlage and Rutter provide an example of the research that identifies school-controlled factors which increase, rather than reduce, dropout rates. According to their study, factors such as socioeconomic status and school performance are important variables in determining who drops out of school. In their analyses, however, these variables are less powerful than students' perceptions about teacher interest in them, as well as the effectiveness and fairness of school discipline.[27] Wehlage and Rutter go on to suggest that the dropout problem is better understood and can be studied if it is viewed as a result of a combination of specific student characteristics with certain school conditions and factors. It is important to note here

that, regardless of other factors, alienation from teachers and school is a common characteristic among students who drop out.

More information on the role that schools play in affecting dropouts is given by Green and Baker.[28] Their research concluded that dropping out was more highly correlated with the school attended than with the neighborhood in which students lived. Their analysis of data on students who had been forced to transfer because of school closures was particularly insightful. In some cases dropout rates of students from certain residential areas were cut in half after they entered a different school. Their research also showed that socioeconomic status and home environment were far less influential factors on remaining in school than was the particular school attended.

McDill, Natriello and Pallas are used by the Texas Education Agency to identify characteristics of schools which have high dropout rates. They reported that these schools:

1. Have high rates of student disorder and discipline problems
2. Are concentrated in large cities and are themselves large in size
3. Have a high proportion of economically disadvantaged ethnic and racial minority students
4. Have poor teacher-administration cooperation
5. Have teachers who emphasize the maintenance of control in classes rather than instructional objectives
6. Have teachers who employ ambiguous sanctions (e.g., lowering grades as a disciplinary practice or ignoring misbehavior)
7. Have rules that are not clear or fair or students who do not believe in conventional social rules (p. 157).[29]

Research such as that noted above and similar studies are consistent with the "effective schools' research, which developed as a response to the idea that low achievement by poor children was due to certain inherent disabilities. This research and the strategies which have emerged from it emphasize the potential of schools to overcome the influence of student background characteristics and to reduce the number of students who are not successful in school."[30]

There is another aspect of the dropout problem which must be considered; that is, the desire and attempts to identify potential dropout must be tempered with the professional goal of protecting the students involved and of "doing no harm to the client."[31] It is the opinion of some educators that "more harm than good" may result if dropout prevention programs result in stigmatizing at-risk children by labeling them as "underachievers" and placing them in "special" groups. According to a California State Department of Education report, if a student is "predicted" to be a potential dropout, the labeling itself has consequences, not all of which are helpful for the child. On the other hand, it does not help to ignore obvious symptoms that a student is having trouble.[32]

Summary of Analysis of Literature

Originally, the author and the graduate students working with him during the summers of 1987, '88, and '89 were surveying the literature in the ERIC system and the Education Index which pertained to dropouts in general and Hispanic dropouts in particular. During the summer of 1989 it was decided that only research literature and very specialized studies closely related to dropouts in Texas, California or Oregon would be used in this written report. One is asked to remember that the major thrust of the study was to find what information Hispanic dropouts would give as to why they dropped out of school, and what they would state to be promising practices to help keep more Hispanic teenagers from dropping out of school. It is true, however, that many of the research findings of the literature dealing with dropouts in general support and correlate the findings of this survey--the literature and the analysis of data obtained in the interviews.

The literature researched in this study shows that the following are some of the leading causes for persons dropping out of school:

1. The need or personal desire to work
2. Being pregnant or, on the part of males, future fatherhood
3. Early marriage and lack of money or family problems
4. Low academic performance, truancy, dislike of school, reading and language problems, poor school attendance

5. Low socioeconomic status of parents, or lack of family tradition of valuing education

6. Being a member of certain ethnic/racial groups.

This researcher's analysis of literature seems to indicate that the following are the most promising practices for reducing the number of dropouts and thus keeping more students in school:

1. Offering specific programs designed for specific groups of at-risk student populations.

2. Providing specific educational programs that employ other opportunities and services such as work-study, home bound instruction, night classes, and social services.

3. Early identification of potential dropouts, special efforts and educational programs to retain at-risk students and special programs to entice students to return to school or to enroll in night school or GED programs.

4. Constant attempts by school systems to employ and retain well educated, highly qualified, concerned teachers and continuous efforts on the part of the school to provide realistic, meaningful, and reasonably challenging curriculum.

5. Special efforts on the part of school personnel to work with parent, civic, business, and religious groups to increase school attendance and support for education.

6. Honoring teachers, parents, administrators and community leaders who distinguish themselves by their work in preventing and recovering dropouts.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The procedures used to collect data were as follows:

1. Hispanic teachers were each asked to locate five or more Hispanic dropouts who were 16 to 20 years of age and ask them four specific questions:

Why did you drop out of school?

What did you like--if anything--about school?

What did you dislike most about school?

What, if anything, would have caused you to stay in school?

The teachers were asked to record any other comments or remarks volunteered by the dropouts which they judged as being relevant to this study. Seven teachers interviewed 39 students during the summer of 1987. Five teachers interviewed 47 students in July, August and September of 1988. During the summer and fall of 1989 six teachers working in teams of two interviewed 54 dropouts.

2. Hispanic teenagers were asked to do interviews of dropouts exactly as the teachers were asked to do. Each teenager was a student in a public school, a graduate of a public school or a college student not over 20 years of age. Practice interviews were staged, and all the interviewers were briefed on the purposes of the study and instructed to keep all names confidential. In some cases they had one or more friends along with them, but they were not in anyway to communicate the real reason for asking the specific questions. Four teenagers interviewed 17 dropouts

in 1987. Six teenagers interviewed 24 in 1988. In 1989 five teenagers were asked to locate and interview 31 dropouts. The total number of dropouts interviewed by teenagers was 72.

3. Each Hispanic business person taking part in this study was asked either to interview one dropout that they personally knew or to answer the four questions for the dropout they knew personally the way they felt the dropout would have answered the questions had he/she been personally asked the questions. In four of these cases the author of this report was present when the business persons answered the questions for a dropout they knew. In each of the four cases the dropout was a relative.

Early in the fall of 1989 this author asked five of the experienced teachers helping with the study to examine the data of the dropouts who had actually been interviewed by business persons and the responses by the six business persons who were answering the questions for a dropout. The teachers were asked either to recommend dropping the responses which were submitted by the business persons acting in proxy, to recommend inclusion of the data or to state that the responses would not distort the findings. It was the unanimous decision of the five teachers that the data supplied by the six business persons should be used and that it was so similar to the other data that it did not distort the research findings.

The author then asked three of the teachers who had master's degrees and had completed at least one course in research procedures to help him analyze the responses to the four questions

as given by the three groups. These same teachers had also participated in the interviewing process. They and this researcher carefully studied and classified the exact wording of each response to each specific question. These responses were then summarized under a general statement or category which would, in the opinion of the Hispanic teachers and the author, retain and convey the meaning of the responses of each teenage dropout even though the verbatim wording of each one could not be given. The responses gathered by the Hispanic teenagers were analyzed separately. This was considered to be absolutely necessary for the integrity of the study even though there was a great overlapping of responses to the teenagers' interviewing with that of the adults who gathered responses. Later, most of the data gathered by the teenagers was combined with that from the work of the teachers and the business persons. The responses to the four questions were grouped and counted. The results bring out the fact that some teenagers listed two separate reasons together as one in responding to a single question. This, of course, resulted in more responses to each specific question than the number of teenagers being interviewed. This problem was solved by this author and the three Hispanic teachers deciding to group the reasons by types as classified and indicate the specific number of times each type was given. The results for each question are given below.

In response to the first question--Why did you drop out of school?--the findings using the procedures described above were as follows:

1. School related reasons (school people too hard on me, did not like the school, school work made no sense to me, I felt there was nothing in it for me at that time, the school day was too long, I hated to get up before light and go to a place every day that I hated, I had rather work here than sit in the stupid school, I hated the teachers, the teacher and the principal hated me, I stayed in trouble at school, none of the other girls liked me, most of the other kids did not like me, I got behind, especially in math and biology, I was older than the others in my classes, I was failing anyway and I failed two subjects last year, I wasn't very good in school, I could not do the work like the rest of the kids, there were a lot of reasons--mostly, I hated school, I got tired of school, I got kicked out two times, I made bad grades, I missed too much to pass) - 74

2. Reasons related to economics (dropped out because I wanted to make my own money, to get a job, to help my family, needed to work, wanted to be with friends who had dropped out and were working) - - - - - - - - - - - 56

3. Marriage (male and female--includes those who said they were planning to get married) - - - - - - - - - - - 17

4. Pregnancy (females only) - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 11

5. Peer related responses (my friends had dropped out or moved away, my family moved and I never started back, the crowd I run around with all dropped out)- - 8

6. Family related reasons (I was sick so much and had to stay home, my folks made me stay home to look out for my sisters and brothers, my father wanted me to go to work after I got into trouble, my mother made me stay home, my folks made me ride the school bus and I got into trouble on it, my folks drank all the time and they let me stay home, I did not have enough money for clothes and all of the things you need to have at school) - 7

7. Fathering a child (accused of getting a girl pregnant, "blamed" for getting a person pregnant, family made me drop out to help a girl "I got pregnant")- - 4

TOTAL 177

As classified, there were 177 responses from the 173 teenagers interviewed by the teachers and business persons.

Seventy-two dropouts were interviewed by Hispanic teenagers. They too asked the question: Why did you drop out of school? The responses were counted and classified as listed below. This author and the three teachers were very surprised at the similarity of the responses gathered by the teenagers to those gathered by the teachers and business persons. Here again, certain teenagers gave more than one specific reason for quitting school.

1. School related reasons (did not like school, hated to go to school, school was a drag, hated teachers who talked at you all day, stayed in trouble at school, missed too many times to pass, could not understand the work, did not want to go every day, hated school bus rides, got in too many fights, failed grades, was not passing, did not care for it, the P.E. teacher stayed on me so much) - 31

2. Economic reasons (wanted to have some money, needed money to buy things, wanted to get a car, be on my own, a friend got me a good job, needed a full-time job, my mother got me a job, most of my crowd quit and got good jobs, wanted my own life and money with my friends) - 29

3. Marriage as the reason (got married, started living with a friend and we got married, got pregnant and had to get married, got married so I could quit, decided to get married and drop out) - - - - - - - - - 7

4. Family related reasons (my family moved around so much, my brother quit and got jobs, my uncle got work for me and my brother, I was older than the other kids, I had to help at home, there were too many kids, my mother would not buy clothes for me and my sister, my father said quit he did not care) - - - - - - - - - 8

5. Pregnant (females only) - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 4

6. Fathering child (males only) (got a girl in trouble with a baby, knocked up a girl, and my people made me go to work) - 2

Total responses to this question was - - - - - - - - - 81

The second question asked by all three groups of interviewers was "What did you like--if anything--about going to school?" At this point this researcher and the three teachers helping him felt that the responses to the three groups interviewing were so similar that these could be treated together as given below. Some respondents gave more than one answer.

1. Responses related to the school in general (I liked the magnet school, I liked school X, "people" were friendly, sports, had friends at school, girl friends, boy friends, I could go to school and work some too, my people liked this school and I liked it, I felt at home there) - 53

2. Responses related to school personnel and instruction (teachers who explained things, teachers that would help you, teachers who were friendly, teachers who did their job right, teachers that did not treat you like a little kid, teachers who used films, "movies" or t.v., teachers who did not boss you around, principal who was friendly, the counselors, people who understood your problems, teachers who could speak Spanish, teachers interested in you, the teachers who knew what was happening in the world, Mexican-American teachers who cared, teachers who made you try, teachers who knew what to do, teachers who did not call you names, teachers who did not make fun of you and your friends, teachers who knew I had a problem but would help me, teachers who would let you make up work, "people" who helped me with reading and math, teachers who showed me how to study, teachers who explained the homework and seat work, teachers that let us study together) - 97

3. Responses related to school subjects (liked general math, business course, history with Mr. X, some science, Spanish, learning English, geometry, the "movies" we saw, the tutor I had in English, the work in history and math, the band and music, physical education and football, courses I was interested in like science and business, subjects that didn't have to take so much work home, courses that I "could understand," school work that made some sense to me, teachers who let you know where "you stood" in their classes, teachers who gave you some choices, English and stories about people, the library books I read in junior high, the government class and projects) - - 103

Total classified responses to this question was - - 253

The third question asked by the three groups of interviewers was "What did you dislike most about school?" Again, the responses obtained to this question by the three groups of interviewers were so similar that it was decided to group them together. This author wants to emphasize, however, that at the beginning of the study in 1987 it was his opinion and the opinion of the Hispanic teachers interviewing the first group of teenagers that the responses should not be "lumped" together. It was only after careful study and analysis of all the data that the decision to combine responses to the second, third, and fourth questions was made.

The responses to the third question are given below. Two hundred and thirty-nine teenagers gave responses; six of the responses were given by proxy by six of the business persons interviewing. The responses overlap and the wording of many were essentially the same. This resulted in this researcher and the three teachers assisting him to summarize the responses as follows:

1. Elements related in general to school and curriculum (going so early in the dark, having to go all day, did not like the work, could not understand some of the things I was supposed to know, having to go when I had flu, colds, when I was sick, the tests, the stupid tests, all the time cramming for tests, could not read very good, did not have time to work, could not go and work, trying to find out what I missed when I had been absent, getting suspended, the bad grades I made, spelling in English, not having clothes like some of the others, going to a new school and having to leave my friends, being bossed around, fights, not having any friends, could not play football, was treated like I was a prisoner, the "whippings," punished all the time, long bus rides, waiting to get out, having to take P.E. every year, having to

sit all day, being hungry all afternoon, being pregnant and trying to hide it, people made fun of me, not being allowed to go where I wanted to go to school, being "accused" of things I did not do)

Total responses classified as curriculum and school related in general and which could be listed as or identified under the specific wording above was - - 142

The fourth and final question asked of the interviewers in this survey was "What, if anything, would have caused you to stay in school?" The combined responses are grouped below employing, as much as possible, terms used by the teenagers answering the question. Again, some respondents gave more than one factor that might have caused them not to drop out.

1. Factors related to school, instruction or curriculum (if I could have done better, if I had not made such bad grades, if I could have worked part of the day and gone to school part time, night classes, if it had not cost so much, if I had liked it, if I could have gone to school X--another school, if the teachers did not get on my case so much, if I could have gotten along with the teacher better, a different principal--counselor--P.E.--or English teacher, could have learned what I needed in math and science, if I had had more good teachers like "John Doe," if everything had not been so rushed and like a prison, if the time at school was not so long, if I had not gotten behind, I got too far behind and if I had not given up that year, if I had felt that it made "no" difference to anyone, if I could have read better and if I knew English a little more, if I could have kept up with the others, if I had had a tutor like I did in junior high, if I had believed it was important, if I had stayed out of trouble in the tenth grade, if I could have taken some of the work at night, if my school had been closer to where I lived, if I could have talked better, if I could have been there every day, if I knew how to study and read better, if I had had someone to explain things to me, if I had not failed two subjects at the same time, if I could have studied more at school, if I could have done my homework at school, if my teachers had not made me do so much writing

which they said I didn't do right, if I had had more time to study and review, if I could have gotten out of Miss X's room and had another teacher, I had not "git" so far behind, there was no way, if I had not missed more days than they let you miss or fail you, if I had not had so many weird teachers, if I had been interested in school I would not have quit, if I could have been in things like the other kids) The number of responses classified in this category was - 131

2. Factors related to family and friends (more help from my family, if there had not been so many kids in my family, if my family had not needed me to work, had not moved away from schools so much, had not lived where we lived, father had not been gone so much and stayed drunk so much, if my father had not sent so much to relatives in Mexico and had given the money for me and my brothers, if I had had more clothes, if my family had not let me work and miss school, if my family felt different about schools, if I had not been pregnant, if I had waited to get married, if I had not had to get married so fast, if my boy friend had not left school and town, if I had not started a family, if the crowd I ran around with had been different, if I had not been sick so much that year, if my people had been able to take care of my baby, if my mother had not been sick so much, if my folks had seen how much value there was in school, if my people had known about going to high school, if my father had not left us and started another family, if my folks would have helped me get back in when I quit, if my parents had not expected me to pass and work, if my parents would have let me play on teams, if my parents had not hated the teachers so much, if I could have stayed out of "special education" classes, if I could have done better on state tests)

From 123 of the interviews there were - - - - - - - - 148 responses that were given as just stated or essentially the same in meaning if not in word.

The total number of responses that could be accepted and classified as responses to question four was - - 279

ANALYSIS OF DATA

A study of the data taken from the answers to questions asked the teenagers in this survey point up the fact that the causes for persons quitting school are in most cases interwoven. Usually the act of leaving school is a result of economic, social, and cultural forces.

Clearly, economic factors were operating against many of the dropouts in this study. Fifty-six of the 245 students actually listed specific money-related needs or money as the reason for their dropping out of school; yet, many of the other responses classified cannot be separated from economics. For example, school and family related responses such as "I missed too much," "I got behind," "there was nothing there for me," "I was older than the other kids," "my folks made me stay home and look out for my sisters and brothers," "my father/mother wanted me to work," "I got married and had to work" are inseparable from the economic.

On the other hand, reasons given and classified as school related cannot be separated from the economic, cultural, family related, peer related, marriage and pregnancy. For example, consider the following responses given by the respondents and classified as school related: "I had rather work than sit in the stupid school," "I got behind because I missed too much," "I had to miss so much I was failing anyway," "there were a lot of reasons--mostly, I hated school," "I made bad grades," "my family moved and I never started back." Many of these reasons are very

similar to those found by researchers studying different groups and different geographic populations during the past fifteen years.

This author is convinced, however, that one should not generalize that all dropouts are alike and quit school for essentially the same reasons. The research set forth earlier in this report and some not mentioned in this study does show great similarity. There are ethnic similarities and differences shown by previous studies, especially those made during the past ten years. Previous reports such as those done by the Texas Education Agency, the Intercultural Development Research Association and the California State Department of Education, however, show that Hispanics have a higher percentage of dropouts than Anglos or African-Americans.

This study was not concerned with rates or percentages, but rather what were the reasons the dropouts themselves would give for quitting school. Each dropout brings to his personal situation a different combination of cultural, ethnic, economic and social factors. Yet this study would seem to confirm the following observations as selected and determined by the author and the three Hispanic teachers helping with the study:

1. School-related reasons are one of the major causes of Hispanic teenagers dropping out of school. These reasons cannot be separated from the cultural, economic, and social environments from which these students come. An examination of these school-related reasons have crucial implications for modification of the school and educational programs. Students differ in intelligence, special aptitudes, ability, personality, learning styles, and value systems. Recognition of

these differences must be expressed at the state and local levels in the modification of instructional programs. It must also result in more recognition and support of minority and Anglo groups who are at-risk of dropping out.

2. Economic reasons drove more than 20 percent of the former students studied into quitting school, according to their statements. Research published by the National Commission on a Secondary Schooling for Hispanics corroborates this finding as do many other studies. The evidence would seem to demand that resources and new approaches be brought to bear on generating creative solutions for education and employment needs for dropout prevention. "More collaboration is needed among schools, businesses, social service agencies and the federal government working with the state to address the dropout problem" is the way two of the teachers working with this survey put it. The graded system, borrowed by Boston Educators from the Prussian military schools in the 1850's and installed first in the high school, then the elementary and junior high school, must be adapted to present-day problems. The public must realize some students need a study-work program; others need night classes and part-time schooling year round. Still others must have special programs for special needs such as English as a second language program. Every young person, be he/she Hispanic, Anglo or other, is not going to fit into or be accommodated by the traditional or slightly modified traditional school.

Already useful programs are emerging; and with the appearance of these new approaches comes the realization on the part of many educators and public leaders that no one program or program model is best.

3. Family reasons, marriage, fathering a child are reasons which appear to account for a large percentage of students quitting school. In this survey these related factors appeared to be at least 25 to 30 percent of the causes of students dropping out of school. A casual review of the literature on dropouts in general, and Hispanics specifically, will show that most studies made during the 1970's and 1980's would indicate 20 to at least 30 percent for several ethnic groups. This is also true of some Anglo groups.

4. Peer-related reasons were stated by only eight of the teenagers interviewed as the major reason they dropped out of school. This author believes that this is an underrated cause. On the other hand, one must keep in mind that the causes for dropping out of school as stated above are interrelated.

5. Responses from the interviewees, despite the fact they had to quit school, indicate that there were specific and general factors in the school system they liked. They were willing to state these as that which they liked best about school. Some of the general responses indicated they had liked certain schools; the people were considered to be friendly by certain ones; some stated they had friends at school; and certain ones did list the fact they could work and go to school a factor they liked about school. About 20 percent of those studied gave such general and favorable responses toward school in general.

6. Ninety-seven responses from 35 percent of the population studied listed 97 favorable responses to school personnel and the instruction they had received when they were in school. When these results are combined with those stated in number five above, the author considers this to be significant, not so much because of the numbers set forth, but primarily because of the nature of the responses and the many possibilities these comments seem to open up for the education of at-risk teenagers of all ethnic groups. For example, the reader is asked to consider again some previous statements such as: "people who helped me with reading, math, subject so and so"; "teachers who explained things well"; "teachers who would help you"; "teachers who did their jobs right"; "teachers who taught me how to study." Yes, a person could say, "Well, so what? That is what teachers are supposed to do." One must remember, however, that in this study these teenagers were dropouts.

7. About 40 percent of the persons interviewed gave 103 positive responses to school subjects when they responded to question number two: What, if anything, did you like about school? Again, analysis of the types of comments supplied by the interviewees would seem to encourage educators and the public to renew their efforts to retain more Hispanics in schools. This author feels that the last statement can be generalized to other ethnic groups also.

8. There were 276 responses that expressed specific individual dislikes about either the school and curriculum or school personnel given by the 245 dropouts studied. This author and the teachers interviewing the subjects were impressed with the objectivity of the dropouts interviewed. To this author the responses are not just valid in general; they are a strong indication that schools must be more flexible in attempts to provide a quality education to a heterogeneous school population in a pluralistic society. Old programs may be just treating symptoms.

The responses to question three indicate a need for more personal and remedial instruction, a modified school-day or night for some students, school and work-related programs, careful use of teacher-made tests and standardized tests, better cooperation between the school and parents and businesses and the school, and better correlation between the school and social agencies.

9. There were 279 responses to question four: What, if anything, would have caused you to stay in school? One hundred and thirty-one of these related to school, instruction or curriculum. These 131 responses and the 148 responses classified as factors related to family and friends are, in most cases, given in a negative tone. This is understandable. The language used does convey discouragement on the part of the school leavers, but it also underlines the fact that there is much that can and must be improved by the school, teachers, and society.

The responses related to family and friends are difficult to analyze with the idea of pointing up solutions. There were 148 responses that, taken together, gave this researcher and the Hispanic teachers helping in the study reasons for much thought. Definitely, these responses are in many ways inseparable from cultural, economic, social, and religious factors. To this

researcher they demand more concern for better human relations, more intercultural education, more home and family living education and more modification in school programs.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study and the conclusions of the teachers who helped in this survey seem to warrant the following implications:

1. The Effective Schools Movement in Texas, which has its focus on the development of basic skills in reading and mathematics, must receive greater support.

2. The schools must seek success for all students with greater emphasis on individualized instruction.

3. Absenteeism must be reduced even more in Texas schools. This will necessitate changing the traditional organization of high schools, the way classes are managed, modification of instructional procedures and greater cooperation between home and school.

4. School personnel must work together to establish clear and realistic instructional goals that will provide the basis for determining teaching objectives, content to be studied, and teaching materials to be employed.

5. Schools must pay greater attention to and provide more help for students whose economic needs necessitate their working. There must be more work-study programs and more flexibility in school scheduling and night classes.

6. Work-study programs should also allow for job placement and academic and vocational counseling.

7. Education programs, on the other hand, must be academically challenging for at-risk students. Any program modification for the elements listed above must never result in slamming the door on the possibility of students going into some form of post secondary education.

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